



THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

# 1: THE BIG PICTURE



## Warm Up

- » How do people describe God?
- » Where do their opinions come from?

## Study

### 1/ OUR SOURCE OF TRUTH

God wrote the Bible to give us an objective means of knowing the truth.

2 Peter 1:20-21 “Above all you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet’s own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.”

We trust the Bible because we trust its Author. We do not trust new “truths” or old suspicions about the Bible, because if they were true, then it would mean that God is not capable of personally and clearly communicating with His creation. No, God has given us all we need to know, in just one source.

So what does God want to tell us? The Bible tells us two main things: who God is and what His plan is for our lives. Let’s look at each in turn.

### 2/ WHO IS GOD?

There is a sea of human opinions about who or what God is, from a spiritual force, to a moral ideal, to every blade of grass. But who does God say He is?

Psalms 62:11-12 “God has spoken plainly, and I have heard it many times: Power, O God, belongs to you; unfailing love, O Lord, is yours.”

God is a personal being who is pure love and unequalled power. Any belief or action that undermines these qualities misrepresents God.

### 3/ WHAT IS GOD’S PLAN FOR US?

Matthew 6:9-10 “Our Father in heaven: May your holy name be honored; may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

God’s purpose is to bring His kingdom — His love and power — to earth. Understand that the quality of our world is determined by the quality of its leadership. Therefore, we need God to rule our world and our lives if we are ever to experience the peace and joy we long for (Romans 14:17).

How does God advance His kingdom on earth? One person at a time. God could demand obedience, but since His kingdom is based on love, instead, He offers us a choice. Consequently, our time on earth is a time of decision.

God perfectly designed the world to help us make our decision. He reveals His love, but does not remove the affects of evil. He displays His power, but does not remove our freedom of choice.

Most clearly, God reveals His love and power through creation. C.S. Lewis says, “The Atheist can never be too careful, for God has littered the creation with evidence of Himself.” Even Darwin, when studying just one part of creation, the human eye, admitted, “To suppose that the eye... could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I confess, absurd in the highest degree.”

Romans 1:18,20 “[People] suppress the truth by their wickedness. ...Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.”

In spite of the evidence, why do some people resist believing in an all-loving, all-powerful Creator? It is because believing in such a God implies moral accountability, which is not attractive if we want to live for ourselves.

Sometimes we accuse God of being uncaring or impotent, all the while expecting Him to overlook our own abuse of freedom. Such hypocrisy blinds us from seeing who God really is. Nevertheless, God patiently gives us all opportunities to respond to Him before He destroys evil once and for all.

2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised, as some think. Instead, he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sin.”

## Personal Application

- » Is the source upon which you base your beliefs about God reliable? Why?
- » Why is our resistance toward God moral more than intellectual?
- » Describe how the problems in our world and lives are a leadership issue.

## Prayer

- » What can we pray for in your life?



THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

# 2: SEPARATION



## Warm Up

- » What was positive and negative about the way your parents disciplined you?
- » Why is it necessary that there be consequences for wrongdoing?

## Study

### 1/ WHAT'S WRONG?

What's wrong with this world? Or a better question is, what's wrong with you and me, for this world is simply a reflection of us? The Bible says that the problem is our sin. What is sin? Sin is anything that destroys loving relationships. By definition, sin separates us from God and others.

"It is your evil that has separated you from your God. Your sins cause him to turn away from you, so he does not hear you." (Isaiah 59:2)

Look at these examples of sin; imagine how they break relationships:

"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, lust-ful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-22)

Looking over the list, all of us have sinned, but the question begs to be asked, "Are we really that bad?" Surely we don't mean to hurt others, and "other" people have done far worse. Doesn't it seem as though God is overreacting?

### 2/ IS GOD JUST?

Well, God is not overreacting because "small" sins are the same as "big" sins in that selfishness drives them both. And selfishness is "really that bad" because it is the root cause of all conflict and division.

"What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you?" (James 4:1)

It follows that God must ultimately destroy evil if He is to succeed in establishing a kingdom of love on earth, for selfishness and love can't coexist.

So God must destroy sin and selfishness if He is to destroy the cause of all alienation and pain. More than that however, He must punish the evildoer.

"For those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." (Romans 2:8) and, "If we deliberately keep on sinning... there is the terrible expectation of God's judgment and the rag-ing fire that will consume his enemies." (Hebrews 10:26-27)1

Some ask, "Why doesn't God just forgive and forget?" It is because a love that ignores sin is void of justice. And without justice there is no safety for the weak, respect for the victim or consequence for the criminal. The absence of justice is not forgiveness and harmony, but chaos, abuse and destruction.

### 3/ YES BUT...

If we were watching a movie that was a fight between good and evil, we enjoy it when the bad guys get what they deserve. What is disturbing about this re-al-life epic is that we are the bad guys.

Like any criminal, we work very hard at avoiding prosecution. We question the justice system, minimize our crime, blame others, appeal for a lesser sentence, or avoid judgment day entirely by denying that it will ever happen or by hoping for reincarnation. Regardless, the sobering reality is that we must all give account to God for our selfishness.

"Each person is destined to die once and after that to face judgment." (He-brews 9:27) and, "It is time to destroy all who have caused destruction on the earth." (Revelation 11:19)

God's heart is always to extend mercy to each one of us. But if we see mercy as a way to remain selfish, we deceive ourselves. Therefore, the question that faces us presently is not about how to avoid judgment, but is whether we will turn from sin and selfishness and choose to love God and others.

## Personal Application

- » Why must God deal with sin so decisively in the end?
- » Are you selfish? Why would God's dealings with you be just?

## Prayer

- » What can we pray for in your life?



THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

# 3: JESUS CHRIST



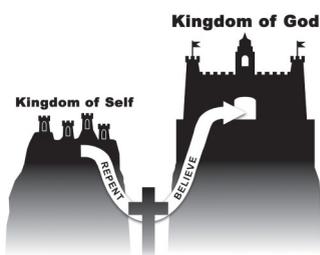
## Warm Up

- » Growing up, what did you hear about Jesus Christ?
- » How did Jesus compare to other religious “superstars”?

## Study

### 1/ TWO SPIRITUAL KINGDOMS

While there are many religions and beliefs, the Bible says that there are only two spiritual kingdoms. What theme unifies every other religion? It is the belief that “salvation” is gained through self-effort. Buddha’s last words were, “Work hard to gain your own salvation.”<sup>1</sup> Mohammed says, “Salvation is to prove one’s fitness for entering [paradise].”<sup>2</sup> Even atheists declare that life is what you make of it. In this view, our performance determines our success.



So what is wrong with being responsible? At one level, nothing; however there is a limit to what our performance can achieve. For example, no one, not even Mother Theresa, is good enough to enter God’s sinless kingdom.

**Romans 3:23** “Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”

But the problem goes deeper, for even if we could earn our salvation, it would mean that our relationship with God would be based on our performance not His love. It would be a relationship without forgiveness or mercy. It is no wonder people turn their back on religion — who wants to spend their life trying to earn the acceptance of a judgmental God?

There are others though, who fill our temples, churches and mosques, who are sincerely trying to please God. But sadly they are as self serving as the “sinner”, for all their “good deeds” are in simply an attempt to secure their own salvation. This means that all their acts of kindness have mixed motives: “Who are you ultimately benefiting?” Even religion does not free us from selfishness.

### 2/ JESUS IS OUR SAVIOR

So let’s restate the problem. Not only do we willfully sin against others, even when we do try to be good, it is still self serving. How are we saved from sin and self, and able to enter a love based kingdom? Jesus Christ is our answer.

**Colossians 1:13-14** “For He has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His dear Son [Jesus]. The Son paid for our sins, and in Him we have forgiveness.”

Because God is just, our sin must be punished; but since God is merciful, Jesus died in our place. God’s forgiveness, then, is not about ignoring our sin; Jesus actually paid for our sin at His own expense.

**Romans 3:25** “God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God’s anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed His blood, sacrificing His life for us.”

**Romans 6:23** “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Jesus’ substitutionary death enables us to have a relationship with God that is based on the gift of His forgiveness, not our performance. And because His death satisfies God’s justice, that forgiveness is eternally guaranteed.

### 3/ THE RESULT OF SALVATION

No other god has ever offered to die for our sin. Only Jesus came from heaven to pay for our crimes, granting us pardon to enter His kingdom.

**Romans 5:8** “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Not only Jesus does love us; He also enables us to love others. When our own relationship with God is secure, we can genuinely love others for their benefit and not our own. Jesus offers His love and forgiveness only to those who truly want to love God and others.

## Personal Application

- » How is Jesus unique among gods and religious leaders?
- » Without God’s love/forgiveness, why would all our acts be self-serving?
- » Do you want to relate to God on the basis of your performance or His love?

## Prayer

- » What can we pray for in your life?



THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

# 4: OUR RESPONSE



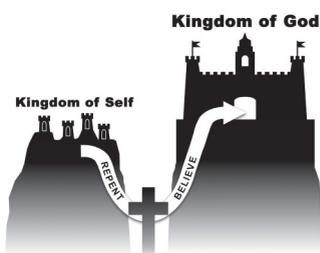
## Warm Up

- » How do people try to “get to heaven”?
- » What does God expect from us?

## Study

### 1/ THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

The Christian message is composed of three parts: the problem, the solution, and our response. The problem is our sin, where we break relationship with God and others. The solution is Jesus, where He pays for our sin and empowers us to love.



### 2/ BUT DOES IT WORK?

Given so great a salvation, why do some Christians live a less than admirable lifestyle? And why have others prayed to God and “tried to be good” only to conclude “Jesus didn’t work for me”? What’s wrong? Well, the problem is not with God; it is with our response to Him. The Bible clearly tells us what God asks of us:

“The time has come,’ Jesus said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’” Mark 1:15

“Repent” means to turn 180 degrees from self-rule to God’s rule; from following our will to God’s will. Repentance is good news for it is a choice to follow someone who is worthy to lead our lives. Repentance is also critical because we can only enter God’s kingdom by surrendering to God’s will.

“Not everyone who calls out to me ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter.” Matthew 7:21

The point is that God can’t save what He doesn’t rule. We can’t disobey God and then expect a blessing any more than a disobedient child should expect a reward for rebellious behavior. So while repentance doesn’t earn God’s love, it positions us to receive what God freely offers.

Therefore, repentance is our commitment to turn from rebellion. But there is still another problem. Just because we want to live right doesn’t mean we can. People around the world are trying to meditate, serve and sacrifice their way into heaven, but their self-effort is never enough.

This is where “believe” comes in. It means trusting to God to “fulfill” our repentance, to deliver us from evil and to empower us to obey. We must believe that God will forgive our sin and enable us to follow His will. Therefore, God expects repentance, but then ensures our success!

“If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.”  
1 John 1:9

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you so that you will obey my laws and do whatever I command.” Ezekiel 36:26-27

### 3/ RECEIVING JESUS AS LORD AND SAVIOR

So when does Jesus “work”? It is when we repent and obey Him as Lord, and when we believe and trust Him as Savior. It is then that God’s truth lives up to its promises.

“...do these things, and you will never fall away. Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 1:10-11

God frees us both from the penalty and the power of sin. He enables us to live a life, not of perfection, but of love; of every increasing righteousness, peace and joy. What an amazing life God offers us!

## Personal Application

- » Why can’t God bless us if we don’t repent and believe?
- » Is there anything that is stopping you from repenting and believing?

## Prayer

- » What can we pray for in your life?